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ABSTRACT

The best means for fighting alcohol abuse in a Native American community is one that has been developed by the community itself. The Blue Bay Healing Center of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana) is an example of two tribes taking responsibility for alcoholism and its control. In designing and operating Blue Bay, the Salish-Kootenai people used a six-step process: looking at the problem face-on, assessing relevant cultural values, identifying four healing principles that support tribal values, assessing local resources, outlining and implementing an action plan, evaluating and starting the process over again. An earlier program focusing on detoxification had not been successful. The tribe set aside 10 acres with old lodges and cabins as a healing center. When an individual returns from residential treatment, he or she is joined by family members at the center, in an environment supported by trained staff and other recovering tribal members. Together the family learns about alcoholism, practices Indian traditions, learns parenting and intra-family communication techniques, and identifies its own resources. The healing center also offers special short-term residential learning programs (such as for young children of alcoholics), hosts social support groups, and provides a place for sober community recreational activities. (SV)

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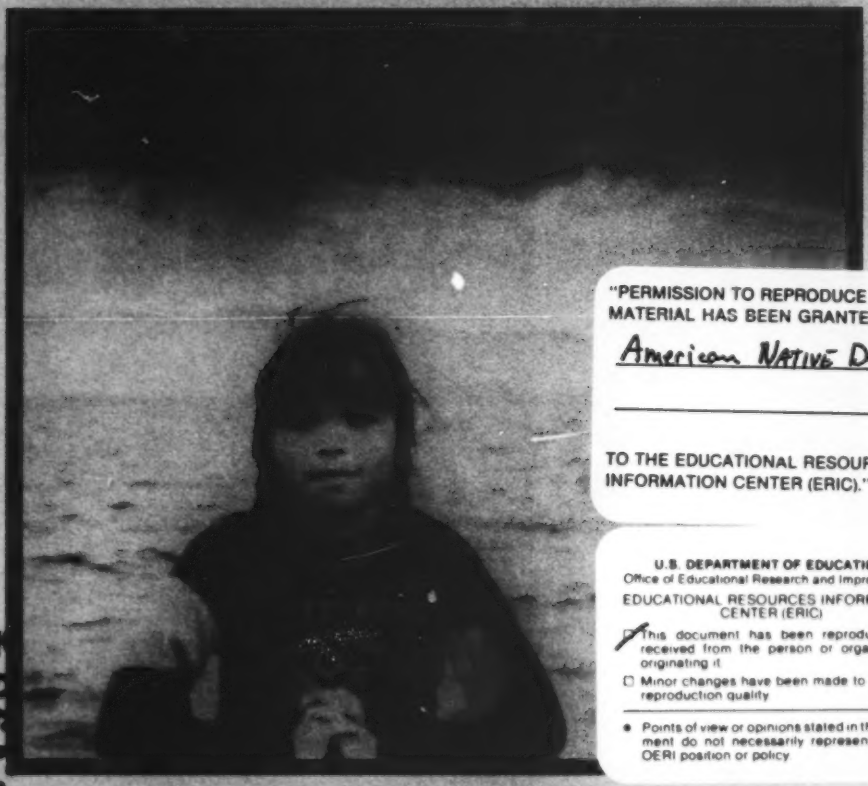

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Our Way of Healing

A resource booklet published by the
Native American Development Corporation

Blue Bay: A Tribal Approach to Fighting Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Our Way of Healing

Introduction

"Only the community itself can eliminate alcohol abuse."

This conclusion, according to the Indian Health Service, is being reached by an increasing number of tribal communities across the United States. It appears to be a key ingredient in recent positive directions and accomplishments being noted in the tribal war against alcohol and drug abuse.

IHS is optimistic. "The general impression," a recent agency report states, "is that a distinct change in the attitude of many tribes toward alcoholism has occurred, and many are beginning to take actions directed at solving the problem."

The actions are varied.

IHS alone currently funds approximately 300 tribal alcohol and substance abuse programs, almost all of which are tribally-designed and operated. The programs offer a variety of services and use a range of prevention and treatment approaches. They include primary residential programs, halfway houses, outreach and aftercare treatment services, supplemented by a variety of preventive programs that emphasize improved self-image, value and attitude clarification, decision-making, and recognition of the physical and emotional effects of alcohol and substance abuse.

Results are encouraging. IHS statistics published in late 1988 show a reduction of 52 percent in the Native American mortality rate from alcoholism. Although the present alcohol mortality rate is still four times greater for the American Indian population than for the general US population, the IHS statistics show that the Indian rate decreased from 54.5 to 26.1 per

100,000 population between 1978 and 1985.

This pamphlet focuses on the idea that the best means for fighting alcohol abuse in a Native American community is a means which has been developed by the community itself. A community-designed approach has the indisputable advantage of belonging to the people it is designed to help.

The Blue Bay Healing Center of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes is an example of two tribes' taking responsibility for alcoholism and its control. The Blue Bay Healing Center, which is funded with monies from a variety of sources, is a focus of tribal pride. Its future promises success.

Blue Bay: A Tribal Approach

At Blue Bay, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Indian Reservation in northwestern Montana have taken control of their battle against alcohol abuse.

They have empowered themselves to utilize their resources and call the shots. They have worked together to define the enemy, establish the purpose of their campaign, and develop and then proceed with an action plan that is based upon clearly articulated tribal principles.

Blue Bay is a Salish-Kootenai effort. It is a celebration of tribal self-determination and dignity.

This booklet looks at the process by which Blue Bay was designed and operates.

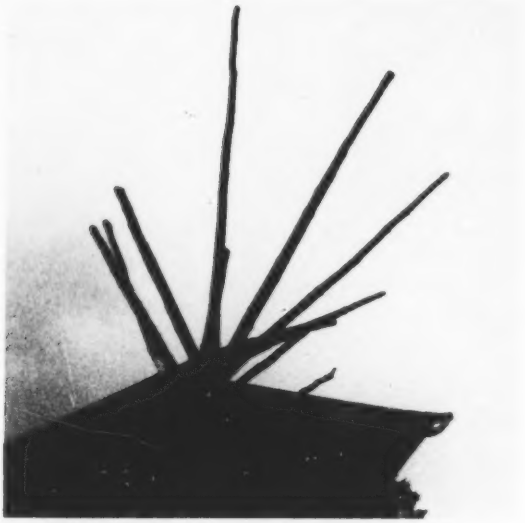
It explores how the Salish and Kootenai Tribes see the problem of alcohol abuse on their reservation; and it describes the values and principles on which the tribes operate their prevention and treatment campaign.

The booklet also looks at the resources

upon which the Salish-Kootenai have called and reviews the action plan and strategy which are now Blue Bay.

Finally, a step-by-step outline summary of the Blue Bay approach is presented.

How It Happened: ***The Process***



In designing and operating Blue Bay, the Salish-Kootenai people used a simple process.

"We used six basic steps," says Anna Whiting-Sorrel, Director of the Tribal Alcohol Program which administers the Blue Bay Healing Center.

"First, we looked at the problem face-on. We asked who is being hurt and how."

"Then we assessed our tribal values, asking what is important to us and how the problem threatens those values."

"We identified four healing principles that could help us address our problem in a way which supported our tribal values."

"Next we looked at our resources and determined what we have within us and our system that can help us gain control over the problem."

"We then outlined an action plan and implemented it."

"Finally, we evaluated and started the whole process over again."

What We Discovered: ***The Problem***

The Salish-Kootenai people determined that their tribal communities had what they considered a serious problem with alcohol abuse.

"From our tribal statistics, we saw," Anna Whiting-Sorrel says, "that alcohol and drug dependency is the leading cause of death among Indian people. We learned that such dependency is a disease and is FATAL if not treated. We learned that alcohol and drug abuse affect not only the abuser, but each family member, the community, and the tribes."

From recent research, we saw that children raised in homes where alcohol and/or drugs are abused are at high-risk to abuse themselves. We realized our young people today are forced to make decisions about their own use at a younger age than before. Also there are many more substances they can use to 'get high'."

"We also saw that our youngsters were making the important decision whether to use or abuse alcohol and other substances without good information and skills. We saw that they often choose

alcohol and drugs because that's the decision their friends and family members have made."

In addition, the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribal Council determined that the tribal alcohol program, as it was operating in the early 1980s, was not working. The program, which had focused on detoxification, was—the council felt—not providing the necessary range of services. Prevention and aftercare were not being adequately addressed.

"The detox services had become a revolving door," says a Blue Bay staff member. "Spin dry. Three hots and a cot. People did not see detox as an option for recovery. You went in and came out no different. Sooner or later, people who returned to the community from detoxification were readmitted to detox because of the same behavior that had put them there in the first place."

"Detox," the Blue Bay staff member continues, "was a well-intentioned program, but it came to be seen as no more than a flop house. It did not offer health. It did not offer a continuum of services. It was too narrow in scope."

In 1984, the Salish-Kootenai Council started to ask a new series of questions. What was missing in the tribes' efforts to address problems of alcohol and substance abuse? Why weren't their efforts working? What was important to the Salish-Kootenai people that was causing tribal efforts to fail?

What We Realized: ***Our Values***

"When we started looking at what is important to us," Anna Whiting-Sorrell says, "we realized that—for the Salish-Kootenai people—children, the family, the community and the tribes are the center around which everything that is worthwhile to us revolves."

"Our culture and our tradition are, in turn, important because they are the primary means by which we display, preserve and enhance our family, community and tribal identity."

Alcohol and substance abuse, the Salish-Kootenai saw was threatening the tribes' very being. It was destroying children, their families and communities.

Culture and tradition were identified as a primary means for attacking the problem and four healing principles, based on principles presented in workshops by the Four Worlds Development Project in Canada, were defined.

What We Defined: ***Our Healing Principles***

Anna Whiting-Sorrel outlines the healing principles which the Salish-Kootenai embraced. They are uncomplicated, she says.

1) The solution for the Salish-Kootenai problem with alcohol and substance abuse must come from within the communities. Others may assist, but we the people must be the subject of our healing process and must direct that process ourselves in our own way.

2) The future is inseparably linked to the past. We must discover the life-preserving, life-enhancing values of our traditional culture. We must also come to understand the debilitating historical process we have undergone as a people. We must unite in a common vision of what human beings can overcome, and build a new future for our children that is based solidly on the values' foundation of our own culture.

3) In order for our people to be able to become competent directors of our own healing and development, an ongoing learning process is required. This

learning process will systematically educate our children from the time they are in their mother's womb until they pass out of this world.

4) The well-being of the individual is inseparable from the well-being of the community. Individual healing and the healing of the entire community must go hand-in-hand.

What We Identified: ***Our Resources***

The Salish-Kootenai people looked at themselves and saw that there were a great number of people in the tribes who were healthy. These people would be the community's primary resource. These people would model healthy, drug-free behavior for those having difficulty with substance abuse and for children, all of whom need appropriate adult role models. As demanded by their first healing principle, the Salish-Kootenai would use themselves to heal themselves.

The Salish-Kootenai people also realized that they had the means for linking the future to the past, the second of their healing principles. For 15 to 20 years, a movement had been gathering momentum on the reservation. This movement, which advocated a return to traditional Indian practices, was beginning to make itself visible. Its time had come and it was ripe for use as a primary tool in the war against alcohol and drugs.

With its own people and traditions, the Salish-Kootenai realized that they could accomplish the third healing principle. Where possible, they would resurrect the old tribal learning processes. Where not possible, they would create new.

The very act of working together, in the tribal tradition, would be the resource that would assure the fourth principle, the hand-in-hand healing of the individual and the community.

The tribes' resources are interdependent. The people, the values, the traditions, the networking all flow one into the other. Recognition of this provided the core of what was needed to fight alcohol abuse on the reservation.

What We Created: ***Our Action Plan***

With a recognition of their values and their resources, the tribes prepared an action plan for fighting alcohol and drug abuse.

Three goals were established:

- To foster personal recovery from alcoholism for high risk individuals;
- To develop a system for helping tribal youngsters consciously choose NOT to abuse alcohol and substances;
- And, to intervene in the generational/cultural cycle of substance abuse.

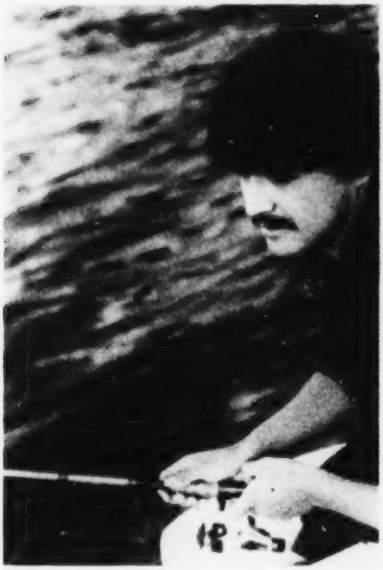
The concept of a healing center, to act as a focus for the tribes' efforts, was explored. Such a healing center would provide a core, a visible place out of which to operate.

The idea of the healing center was found to have merit. It would be community-based. It would accommodate individuals, families and community groups. It could be designed to operate using traditional Salish-Kootenai systems. It could put the Salish-Kootenai healing principles into operation. It would be a visible expression of tribal unity and pride.

In 1987, after the planning years, the Blue Bay Healing Center became a reality. Ten acres of land on the north shore of Flathead Lake were earmarked for use in healing tribal members who were struggling with alcohol and substance abuse. The land included a number of old lodges and cabins that had previously been part of a commercial resort and economic enterprise.

Using funds from a variety of sources, including limited funds from the Indian Health Service and funds from the federal Office for Substance Abuse Prevention, Blue Bay provides a new component in the continuum of services offered by the Salish-Kootenai to fight alcohol and substance abuse.

The Blue Bay component merges prevention and aftercare in a manner which is based on community and family participation. It is intended to supplement the tribes' treatment programs. It is based on a concept that prevention and aftercare flow one into the other in a circular continuum which has no beginning or end.



How We Operate: ***Our Strategy***

Blue Bay operates on the four Salish-Kootenai healing principles.

- It is community designed.
- It is a part of the Salish-Kootenai culture and tradition, evolving to meet today's needs.
- It offers a learning process to educate Salish-Kootenai families in the values and practices of their tradition.
- It focuses on the individual as a part of the tribal community and the tribe as a part of the individual.

Twelve workers staff Blue Bay. These workers are—so to speak—on duty 24 hours a day.

"Working at Blue Bay," one staff member jokes, "really wrecks the basketball season for me. I find I am on call even during intermission. When you work at Blue Bay, you are always identified with the program and its purpose. You have to model good behavior. You have to be willing to examine your own life and face your own issues. And you have to be available to

talk and listen. You've got to show that recovery is possible, that you feel it is of primary importance, and that you are there to help."

Blue Bay Healing Center is unusual in its approach.

The Salish-Kootenai value family. When an individual returns to the reservation from substance abuse treatment, he/she wants to be with family members. But the individual needs some transition and adjustment time. If that is not provided, the substance abuser returns to his/her old environment and abusive patterns resume.

Why not utilize the family as a resource? Why not bring the family into the transition and adjustment process? Why not include them in the recovery learning process? Focus on the individual as part of the family. At Blue Bay, the Salish/Kootenai do just that.

When an individual returns from residential treatment, he or she is joined by family members at the Blue Bay Healing Center. Together the family heals. They spend a period of time, in an environment supported by center staff and recovering tribal members. Together they learn about alcoholism: that it is a disease, how it affects the alcoholic, how it affects other family members, the roles and games each person plays.

At Blue Bay, families also learn how to have fun together. They live in an environment which proudly practices Indian tradition. Role models are provided. Parenting and intra-family communication techniques are explored. Resources are identified and each family member is shown where to go for help when it is needed.

Space, meals and a predictable routine are provided. Youngsters are given responsibilities. Each family member pitches in to help. Trained staff are available for counseling and teaching.

Blue Bay Healing Center also functions as a learning center for specific groups within the community. Special short-term live-in programs are provided for

young children whose Mom and/or Dad, for example, abuse alcohol.

These youngsters are brought together in various age groups, as individuals who share the bonds of the Salish-Kootenai heritage. Together, they learn from tribal members who understand the youngsters' environments. The children are taught about alcoholism. They learn what it is and what it does. They learn that they are not responsible for a parent's drinking. They learn that they have a choice about whether they themselves drink. They learn how to recognize the positives in their families. And they learn where they can get help. They learn they are not alone. They are part of a culture and heritage of which they can be proud.

Blue Bay is a place of support. It hosts a number of support groups where tribal members can get in touch and express their feelings. Alcoholics Anonymous and Children of Alcoholics meetings are held as are workshops to discuss grief or suicide, for example.

Blue Bay Healing Center is a celebration. Its atmosphere is positive. It champions activities. Dances, hiking, swimming, camping, rafting. At least one community-wide sober recreational event a month is held at Blue Bay. All community members are encouraged to use the facilities. It is an uplifting, exciting place to be. Blue Bay demonstrates that people, who are not drinking, can be more than just sober. They can be happy and have fun.

Blue Bay is Indian in a sense that unites the past, the present and the future. The resident manager and caretaker at Blue Bay is a man of dignity with Indian braids and stories of times past. He is quiet, steady and kind. Children love him. He speaks of tradition.

The counseling and cultural staff are younger. All Indian, they have different degrees of association with tradition. Most are college educated, most have lived away from the reservation for long periods of time. A few have been on vision quests. Some participate in sweats.

But the point is, as different as each is from the other, all Blue Bay staff are a part of a vital, evolving tribal experience.

As the visitor enters Blue Bay, he enters the Salish-Kootenai tribal community.

The Six-Step Process

1. We looked face-on at the problem of alcohol and substance abuse in our communities, asking who is being hurt, by what and how.
2. We assessed our tribal values, asking what is important to us and how is that being damaged by alcohol/substance abuse.
3. We adopted four healing principles which honor our values and help us attack alcohol/substance abuse.
4. We looked at our resources, asking what do we have within our tribes and communities that will help us gain control over alcohol and substances.
5. We outlined our action plan.
6. As we implement our strategies, we evaluate and adjust . . . starting the cycle again with step 1.

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The text was written by Nancy Gale based on interviews with Anna Whiting-Sorrell, Administrator of the Blue Bay Healing Center, and her staff.

The photographs on pages 2, 7, 10, 11 and 15 were taken by Cory Gale. Those on the cover and on pages 8, 13 and 17 are by Danny Gale. Nancy Gale took the one on page 5. The people posing for the photos were selected for their positive involvement with the cultural programs of the Blue Bay Healing Center.

The Blue Bay Healing Center, which is operated by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, is located on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Its address is 26 Round Butte Road, Ronan, MT 59864. Telephone: (406) 982-3308.

Copies of this booklet may be ordered, for printing and mailing costs, from the Native American Development Corporation, 1000 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite #1206, Washington, DC 20036. Telephone: (202) 296-0685.

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